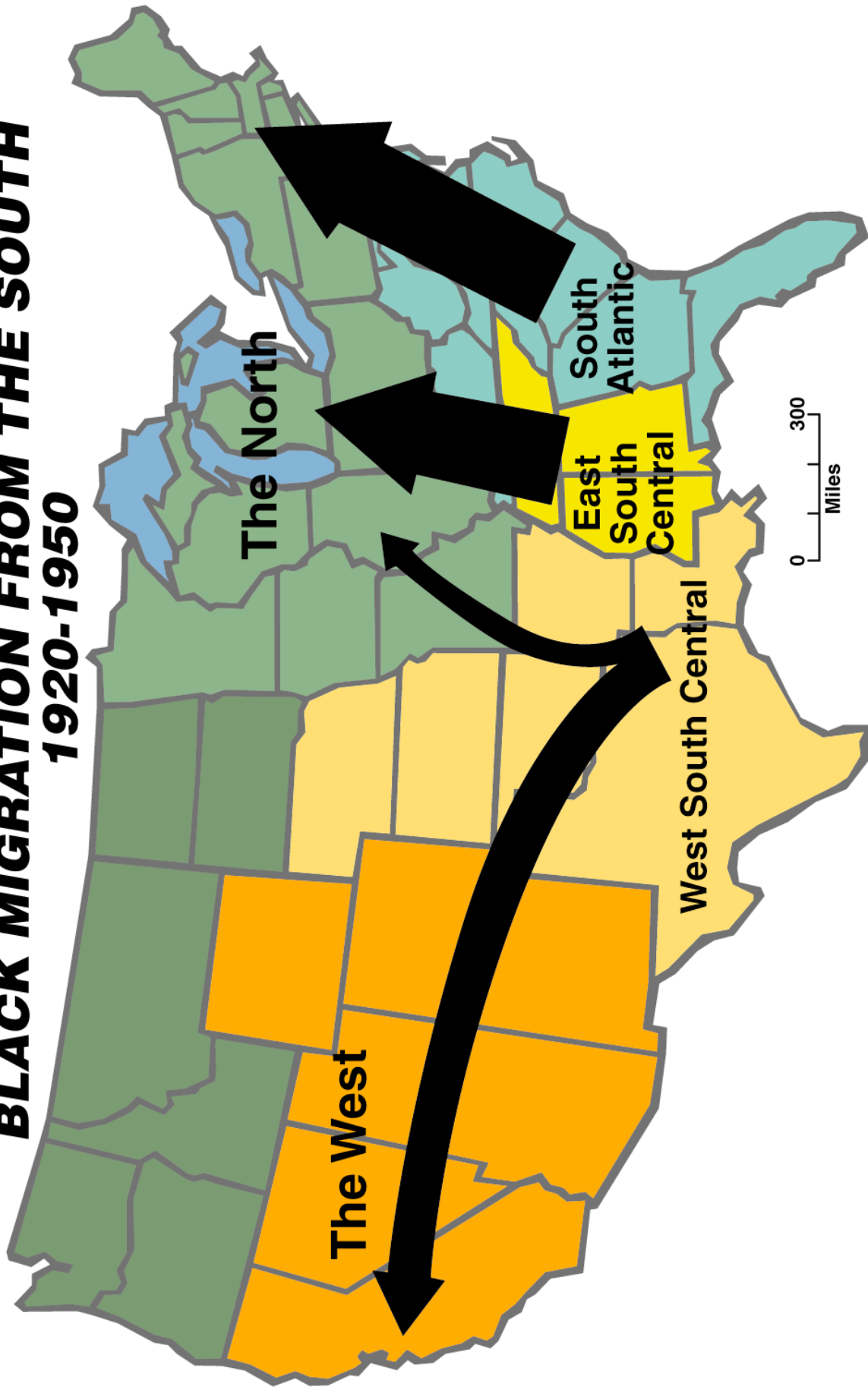


BLACK MIGRATION FROM THE SOUTH 1920-1950



Letters written to the *Chicago Defender*. Note that letters are in their original form. They have not been corrected for grammar and/or spelling.

Troy, Alabama, Oct. 17, 1916

Dear Sirs: I am enclosing a clipping of a lynching again which speaks for itself. It do wish there could be sufficient pressure brought about to have federal investigation of such work. I wrote you a few days ago if you could furnish me with the addresses of some firms or co-operations that needed common labor. So many of our people here are almost starving. . . quite a number here would go any where to better their conditions. If you can do any thing for us write me as early as possible.

Bryan Texas, Sept. 13, 1917

Dear Sir: I am writing you as I would like to no if you no of any R. R. Co. and Mfg. that are in need for colored labors. I want to bring a bunch of race men out of the south we want work some whear north will come if we can git passe any whear across the Mason & Dickson. Please let me hear from you at once if you can get passes for 10 or 12 men. send at once.

Anniston, Alabama, April 23, 1917

Dear Sir: I say your add in the Chicago Defender for laborers. I am a young man and want to finish school. I want you to look out for me a job on the place working morning and evening. I would like to get a job in some private family so I could continue taking my piano lesson I can do anything around the house but drive and can even learn that. Send me the name of the best High School in Chicago. How is the Wendell Phillips College. I have finish the grammar school.

New Orleans, La., May 2, 1917

Dear Sir: Please Sir will you kindly tell me what is meant by the Great Northern Drive to take place May the 15th on Tuesday. It is a rumor all over town to be ready for the 15th of May to go in the drive. the Defender first spoke of the drive the 19th of February. My husband is in the north already preparing for our family but hearing that the excursion will be \$6.00 from here north on the 15th and having a large family, I could profit by it if it is really true. Do please write me at once and say is there an excursion to go leave the south. Nearly the whole of the south is getting ready for the drive or excursion as it is termed. Please write at once. We are sick to go get out of the solid south.

Palestine, Tex., Mar. 11th, 1917

Sirs: this is somewhat a letter of information I am colored Boy aged 15 years old and I am talented for an artist and I am in search of some one will Cultivate my talent I have

studied Cartooning therefore I am a Cartoonist and I intend to go visit Chicago this summer and I want to go keep in touch with your association and too from you knowledge can a Colored boy be an artist and make a white man's salary up there I will tell you more and also send a few samples of my work when I rec an answer from you.

Brookhaven, Miss., April 24, 1917

Gents: The cane growers of Louisiana have stopped the exodus from New Orleans, claiming shortage of labor which will result in a sugar famine.

Now these laborers thus employed receive only 85 cents a day and the high cost of living makes it a serious question to go live.

. . . Please dont publish this letter but do what you can towards helping them to go get away. If the R. R. Co. would run a low rate excursion they could leave that way. Please ans.

Chicago, Illinois

My dear Sister: I was agreeably surprised to go hear from you and to go hear from home. I am well and thankful to go say I am doing well. . . . Please remember me kindly to go any who ask of me. The people are rushing here by the thousands and I know if you come and rent a big house you can get all the roomers you want. You write me exactly when you are coming. I am not keeping house yet I am living with my brother and his wife. My sone is in California but will be home soon. He spends his winter in California. I can get a nice place for you to go stop until you can look around and see what you want. I am quite busy. I work in Swifts packing Co, in the sausage department. My daughter and I work for the same company—We get \$1.50 a day and we pack so many sausages we don't have much time to go play but it is a matter of a dollar with me and I feel that God made the path and I am walking therein.

Tell your husband work is plentiful here and he wont have to go loaf if he want to go work.

Memphis, Tenn., 4-23-17

Gentlemen: I want to go get in tuch with you in regard to go a good location & a job I am for race elevation every way. I want a job in a small town some where in the north where I can receive verry good wages and where I can educate my 3 little girls and demand respect of intelegence. I prefer a job as cabinet maker or any kind of furniture mfg. if possible.

Let me hear from you at once please. State minimum wages and kind of work.

Migration Poetry

Migration

In the waiting room, "Colored,"
Hands, calloused and as black as the rich
Georgia/Carolina/Alabama Dirt they leave behind,
Clasp and unclasp silently,
Some hold Bibles older than freedom,
Others hold food that will not last the long journey.
There is no need to go speak, to go explain
How so many nights of love and terror
So many back cracking, heartbreaking days
So many humbled dreams
Can fit into the small rope-tied case that sits
On the ancient hardwood floor between them.

A stirring at the ticket counter
Stiffens backs, tightens stomachs.
Hard-eyed men with guns in their belts
Stare daggers into the waiting room, "Colored."
In the distance the whoo! whoo! of the train breaks
The stillness of a forever moment.
The men with guns look, shake their heads, and leave
Life goes on.

The tickets to go Chicago/Detroit/New York are heavy
As heavy as the memory of a church built
With sweat and faith and knotted pine
On the edge of the old burying ground.

But there are the children, and there is the hope
Of a people with yet one more river to go cross.

Walter Dean Myers

One-Way Ticket

I pick up my life
And take it with me
And I put it down in
Chicago, Detroit,
Buffalo, Scranton,
Any place that is
North and East—
And not Dixie.

I pick up my life
And take it on the train
To go Los Angeles,
Bakersfield,
Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake,
Any place that is
North and West—
And not South.

I am fed up
With Jim Crow laws
People who are cruel
And afraid,

Who lynch and run,
Who are scared of me
And me of them.

I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket—
Gone up North,
Gone out West,
Gone!

Langston Hughes

Poor Man Blues

By Bessie Smith

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Mister rich man, rich man, open up your heart and mind.
Mister rich man, rich man, open up your heart and mind.
Give the poor man a chance, help stop these hard, hard times.

When you're livin' in your mansion you don't know what hard times means.
When you're livin' in your mansion you don't know what hard times means.
Poor man's wife is starvin,' your wife is livin' like a queen.

Please listen to go my pleading, 'cause I can't stand these hard times long.
Please listen to go my pleading, 'cause I can't stand these hard times long.
They'll make an honest man do things you know is wrong.

Poor man fought all the battles, poor man would fight again today.
Poor man fought all the battles, poor man would fight again today.
He would do anything you ask him in the name of the U.S.A.

Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you.
Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you.
If it wasn't for the poor man, Mr. Rich Man what would you do?

Bound No'th Blues

Goin' down de road, Lord,
Goin' down the road.
Down de road, Lord,
Way, way down de road.
Got to go find somebody
To go help me carry this load.
Road's in front o' me,
Nothin' to go do but walk.
Road's in front o' me,
Walk . . . and walk . . . and walk.
I'd like to go meet a good friend
To go come along an' talk.
Road, road, road, O!
Road, road . . . road . . . road, road!
Road, road, road, O!
On de No'thern road.
These Mississippi towns ain't
Fit for a hoppin' toad.

Langston Hughes

When I Return to go the Southland It will Be

When lions eat grass like oxen,
And an angleworm swallows a whale,
And a terrapin knits a woolen sock,
And a hare is outrun by a snail.

When serpents walk like men,
And doodle-bugs leap like frogs,
When grasshoppers feed on hens,
And feathers grow on hogs.

When Tom cats swim in the air,
And elephants roost in the trees,
And insects in summer are rare,
And snuff can't make you sneeze.

When fish live on dry land,
When mules on velocipedes ride,
And foxes lay eggs in the sand,
And women in dress take no pride.

When a German drinks no beer,
And girls deck in plumes for a dime,
When billy goats butt from the rear,
And treason is no longer a crime.

When the mocking bird brays like an ass,
And limburger smells like cologne,
When plowshares are made of glass,
And the hearts of true lovers are stone.

When ideas grow on trees,
And wool on a cast-iron rams,
I then may return to go the South,
But I'll travel then in a box.

Sparrell Scott

The Land of Hope

I've watched the trains as they disappeared
Behind the clouds of smoke,
Carrying the crowds of working men
To go the land of hope,
Working hard on southern soil,
Someone softly spoke;
"Toil and toil and toil and toil,
And yet I'm always broke."

On the farms I've labored hard,
And never missed a day;
With wife and children by my side
We journeyed on our way.
But now the year is passed and gone,
And every penny spent,
And all my little food supplies
Were taken away for rent.

Yes, we are going to go the north!
I don't care to go what state,
Just so I cross the Dixon Line,
From this southern land of hate,
Lynched and burned and shot and hung,
And not a word is said.
No law whatever to go protect—
It's just a "nigger" dead.
Go on, dear brother; you'll ne'er regret;
Just trust in God; pray for the best,
And at the end you're sure to go find
"Happiness will be thine."

William Crosse